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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: June 22, 2007

12 Eurofighters Enough?

¶1. As withdrawing from the purchase agreement apparently no longer seems realistic, a further reduction of the number of Eurofighter jets to be acquired is becoming increasingly likely, Austrian media say. According to a new strategy paper by the Austrian armed forces, twelve of the interceptors would suffice to guarantee Austrian airspace surveillance.

Semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung writes that the paper submitted by the Austrian armed forces suggesting 12 Eurofighters would be enough for Austrian airspace surveillance appears to be the last ditch efforts in Defense Minister Norbert Darabos' attempts to keep the price for the interceptors as low as possible. Security experts are skeptical, however, whether fewer jets really equal lower costs, because operating and maintenance costs for the individual planes would increase as a result. Nonetheless, the negotiations between the Defense minister and Eurofighter EADS seem to have entered the decisive final state, centrist daily Die Presse says. In addition, the parliamentary investigative committee looking into the circumstances of the purchase deal will soon present its findings. It is expected to recommend a withdrawal from the purchase contract, the Presse adds. Mass-circulation tabloid Kronen Zeitung, meanwhile, sees the latest developments in the Eurofighter case as "putting a new strain on the coalition government."

Suspected Spy Released

¶2. Austrian police have released a Russian man arrested a week ago in Salzburg on suspicion of spying, after Russia refused to waive the man's diplomatic immunity. He is believed to have left the country. An expert opinion from the UN legal office in New York confirmed the Russian's diplomatic status. The suspect is believed to have received sensitive information from a deputy officer in the Austrian army regarding the German-French combat helicopter Eurocopter Tiger.

Reporting on the release of a Russian citizen arrested a week ago in Salzburg on suspicion of spying, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung says the man was part of an official delegation to a UN meeting in Vienna on the peaceful uses of outer space. He is suspected of receiving sensitive information on a German-French combat helicopter from an officer in the Austrian army. The Interior Ministry in Vienna confirmed that the Russian and the Austrian had been under observation for a month before they were arrested. The Russian reportedly paid a substantial amount of money for information received. The Austrian suspect, a vice lieutenant with the army, has meanwhile been suspended from work and could be disciplined further if proven guilty. Russia had called his arrest unfriendly and

harming bilateral relations.

Tough Summit in Brussels

¶3. European Union leaders are preparing for a second day of tough talks in Brussels on institutional reform today. Germany, which currently holds the EU Presidency, is hoping the talks will result in a deal on a new treaty to replace the failed draft constitution. Britain and Poland are among the countries seen as presenting the most obstacles to reaching an agreement. The British government wants to water down proposals on EU foreign policy and Poland insists on renegotiating entirely a proposed voting scheme. All Austrian media agree that the EU summit currently underway in Brussels is fraught with difficulties. Centrist daily Die Presse comments on the "erosion of a community," and suggests that the current tensions could lead to a "fragmentation of the EU, unless the member states succeed in pulling together." Currently, Poland and Britain are posing the greatest threats to the EU. Demands at the summit are becoming increasingly more bizarre, and positions are hardening, which only leaves a 50:50 chance of success, according to the daily. Mass-circulation daily Kurier suggests that Poland's "tough course" and its "macabre behavior" is angering the summit partners in Brussels. The daily quotes Austrian Chancellor Alfred Gusenbauer, who called on outgoing British Prime Minister Tony Blair to support efforts on a new EU treaty: "It would add to Blair's legacy if he made a constructive contribution."

Lebanon Moves against Islamist Fighters

¶4. Lebanon says it has crushed a group of Islamist fighters based in a Palestinian refugee camp after a month-long battle. Muslim clerics acting as mediators said the group, Fatah al-Islam, had agreed to a ceasefire. More than 150 people were killed in the clashes, including at least 20 civilians.

Reporting on the ongoing crisis in the Palestinian territories and the rivalry between Hamas and Fatah, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung says that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has ruled out any chance of a rapprochement. Fatah would "not agree to a dialogue with the Hamas traitors," the daily quotes. Centrist daily Die Presse meanwhile confirms that outgoing British Premier Tony Blair has been proposed as candidate for the post of a new special envoy for the Middle East. In an interview with the daily, Middle East expert at the Brookings Institution, Tamara Wittes, emphasized that the Gaza Strip must be taken into account in efforts to solve the crisis, as it would be "difficult to imagine a solution that excludes almost half of the Palestinian people. It would be possible to realize some kind of Palestinian state in the West Bank only, but it would not solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Without the Gaza Strip there can be no real solution of the conflict."

US Said to Be Looking at Ways to Close Guantanamo

¶5. The US government is working on a decision on whether to shut down the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and transfer the detained terrorist suspects to maximum security prisons in the US, Associated Press said, sourcing high-ranking US government representatives. After reports on the issue were floated in the US media, however, the White House cancelled a meeting of security experts scheduled for today, and stated that the Bush administration was "not nearing a decision" on the status of the Guantanamo camp. According to US government circles, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff and Vice-President Dick Cheney were supposed to have participated in the cancelled meeting on Guantanamo. Earlier efforts to shut down the Guantanamo Bay detention facility had been blocked by Cheney, Gonzales and former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, ORF online news reports. The same government circles suggest, however, that these days, the State, Defense and Homeland Security Departments, as well as the intelligence services are supporting a closure of the Guantanamo camp, according to ORF online. In another report, ORF online news says that recent polls show US President George Bush's popularity ratings have hit a new low: A survey published by US magazine Newsweek says that only 26 percent of Americans approve of President Bush's performance in office. 73 percent say they are not

pleased with the President's Iraq policy; only 23 percent approve.
Kilner